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ABSTRACT

This research paper focuses on the interaction between two prominent roles of mothers: employment and the social placement of daughters in marriage. The findings support the notion of a causal chain that links (a) maternal employment with (b) a different view of social placement with (c) differential maternal encouraging behavior or involvement in courtship. Findings show that working mothers are more likely to view employment as an option for their daughters than are unemployed mothers. The author concludes that evidence is in favor of a change in maternal attitudes toward the social placement of daughters. It is suggested that this change is due to the mother's view of employment, and its consequence is a lessened degree of involvement in a daughter's courtship or mate choice. (Author/WSK)

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The Role of Mothers in the Social Placement of Daughters: Marriage or Work?

The Research Problem

A great deal of attention is currently being paid to the roles and opportunities of women in our society. This concern has been focused for the most part on two main areas: the area of work and the area of family socialization of females. The research reported here is relevant to both of these dimensions. It focuses on the interaction between two prominent roles of mothers: employment and the social placement of daughters in marriage.

Anthropologists and sociologists have traditionally pointed to the importance of the family in the social placement of offspring. Anthropologists (Malinowski, 1929; Murdock, 1949; and Levy-Strauss, 1969) have emphasized the importance of parents and the kin group in making special provision for the marriage of daughters, marriage being anticipated to be the principal adult role of female children. Davis (1949) and Winch (1971) have identified social placement as one of the primary functions and responsibilities of parents, and Goode (1964) has noted that parental involve-

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Marriage or work has been the great dichotomy in the social placement function of parents; work has been the prime task with respect to male children, while marriage has been the chief option of their sisters. Consequently, if we anticipate the possibility of change either in the family's function of social placement or the career attitudes of offspring, when it comes to young women we should look closely at the phenomena of courtship and mate selection, particularly as these are influenced by parents.

The theme of parental involvement in the courtship of their children may be said to represent a point of some conflict in the United States. It is clearly important to parents that their children marry as "well" as they can, and they surely hope that their children will enter into satisfactory and rewarding marital relationships that will also be gratifying for the parents. At the same time, however, there is a strong cultural current that insists that parents should mind their own business, that a child's courtship and choice of a mate are better handled without parental intervention, and that children should display a high degree of autonomy in this area. Parental attempts to exercise influence may be seen as meddlesome, old-fashioned, or even "Old World." It has been an assumption of our democratic social ideology that mate selection in the United States is "free" or "open."

A review of the literature of parental involvement in mate selection and the formation of new families from 1942 to 1972 (Bruce, 1973), however, indicates that parental involvement is a prominent variable in this subject matter; furthermore, it is clear that the most important actors are mothers

and their daughters. What seems to emerge from the literature is a "need to be needed" by mothers, as well as the oft-noted greater dependency and sense of kinship that is encouraged in daughters.

It is against this background that we must note now the emergence of the importance of work and career for women in our culture. As Klein (1963) has pointed out, our era has been witness to the impact of industrialization on the roles of women; while women have in reality always worked at other than specifically domestic tasks, industrial culture brought with it an overt shift from familial to individual rewards. The search for such rewards was considered appropriate for men; for a woman openly to embrace such values, however, was to invite suspicion, if not hostility. The passing of time, the appreciation of and dependence on the additional income, the increasing evidence that the rearing of children is not impeded, awareness of the benefits of satisfaction with work outside the home and acknowledgement of the competence shown in that work, the effect of wars and inflation, and the withdrawal of cultural support for childbearing that is accompanying awareness of the population issue--these are some of the things that have helped to make job or career more acceptable motives for women. It is no longer deviant for women to insist that their sense of personal worth in a work-oriented culture is closely associated with work itself. In the United States in 1920, 20% of the work force was female, while today approximately 40% of the work force is made up of women. Of all women working, the largest portion is the group with children of courtship and marriage age (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970); furthermore during the last three decades the number of employed women in the launching years increased more than two and one-half times (Women's Bureau, 1969).

In bringing together our two streams of information about women, therefore, it is reasonable to ask if a mother's need to be needed by her children (and especially her daughter) will not vary with the circumstances of the mother's life. In particular, if she possesses resources apart from the nest or motherhood, we may ask if she will pay less attention to the maternal function of launching her daughter in marriage by being involved in her daughter's courtship experiences. Her need to be needed may be less if her needs are to some degree met elsewhere.

The testing of this relationship was part of a study by Bruce (1972) in which more than two hundred pairs of white, middle class mothers and never-married daughters of marriageable age from the Upper Midwest responded to a mailed questionnaire. Given the intimate nature of many of the questions, and the considerable length of the instrument, it is interesting to note that 91% of the pairs of questionnaires were returned.

In order to pursue the suggestion by Goode (1959, 1963) that the higher the social class, the greater the intervention in courtship, the sample was initially stratified by three different socioeconomic levels or "treatment groups" on the basis of the occupation, income, and education of the daughters and their fathers. Analysis of variance showed no difference in encouraging or discouraging behavior ($F = 1.188$, with 2 and 225 df for encouraging behavior; $F = 1.109$ with 2 and 225 df for discouraging behavior) for the three levels of our respondents.

Furthermore, no part of the sample was more likely to be working than another part; all three portions of the sample were equally employed or unemployed (X^2 with 2 df = 1.84). It followed, therefore, that any

emerging relationship between working and courtship involvement in this sample would not be confounded by socioeconomic status or by some relationship between socioeconomic status and employment, and the respondents were thereafter treated as one homogeneous sample.

The research reported here sought to test the effectiveness of resource-exchange theory (Blau, 1967; Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Heer, 1958, 1963; Homans, 1961; Safilios-Rothschild, 1970) in predicting the impact of maternal employment on the mother's involvement in the launching task or social placement in marriage for her daughter. Consequently, it was hypothesized that a gainfully employed mother would be less involved in her daughter's courtship than a non-working mother, the former possessing resources and rewards not available to the mother who is not employed and who must seek her rewards from her family and her maternal role alone. We did not assume a significant place for the rewards of "volunteer work" and the like.

The logic of such an hypothesis is that gainful employment in the external social system in a work-oriented culture is a source of extra-familial reward and self-validation for mothers, which consequently modifies their view of the importance of marriage, which lessens the degree of their involvement in the social placement of daughters through marriage. As we shall see, this would especially be the case when the mother thought that her daughter was likely to embrace the idea of work as a potential source of her own rewards in the wider culture. As resource theorists such as Blood, Wolfe, Heer, Safilios-Rothschild, etc. have indicated, possession of the resource of employment alters the role of the wife-mother. In the study reported here, we seek to extend the

implications of resource theory beyond the question of marital power in decision-making to other fundamental family functions--in this case, social placement and marital launching.

A scale was constructed to measure the degree of maternal involvement in the courtship activity of daughters as perceived by the daughers themselves. The scale enjoyed quite satisfactory face and construct validity and yielded scores for maternal encouraging and discouraging behavior. The validity of the scale was further underwritten by item analysis techniques (Bohrnstedt, 1969), and Cronbach's Alpha, as an estimate of the reliability of the scale, stood at .86 for encouraging items and .93 for discouraging items. The two scales were not related; they correlated -.04; the use of a combined score, therefore, is not indicated. In this paper we will restrict our discussion to scores derived from the encouraging scale--that is, measures of things mothers do to encourage young men whom they see as potential suitors for their daughters; this score, unlike the discouraging score, was found to be significantly correlated with a daughter's ranking on courtship status. The discouraging scores were not related to any of the independent or background variables reported here. The important thing seems to be what a mother does or does not do to encourage, rather than what she does or does not do to discourage, courtship. It is the encouraging score, therefore, that makes up the "courtship involvement" score of the mother. Further details about the sample, scale construction, and tests of validity and reliability are available elsewhere (Bruce, 1972).

The Findings

Following our resource orientation toward maternal employment, we expect to find greater encouragement of courtship from mothers who "stay at home," inasmuch as they do not possess the rewards of gainful employment. In addition to the stimulation of a change in environment, we have suggested that salary or wages are tangible expressions of the woman's worth, relatively speaking, in the eyes of others than the members of their families. Conversely, unemployed mothers may be expected to look for their rewards from their families to a comparatively greater degree; consequently, we look for more involvement on their part in encouraging young men and helping their daughters in the matter of courtship.

As we see in Table 1, mothers who do not work do more than working mothers to encourage courtship. Such a finding, of course, supports our resource hypothesis.

Table 1

Maternal Encouraging Behavior, by Employment Status

	N	Mean Encouraging Score	t	P
Working	111	24.892	1.685 (210 df)	$< .05$
Not working	101	26.446		

It apparently is not the case that working mothers simply have less time, because the difference between part-time and full-time working mothers is not at all sig-

nificant. Similarly, several other variables thought to be prominent in the matter of female employment (satisfaction with choice of working or not working, husband approval, occupational prestige) make no significant difference in this respect.

Does this mean that working mothers are simply less interested in their daughters' activities? We have no evidence that this is the case, and it seems unlikely on its face. Furthermore, nearly all of the mothers reported the desire for their daughters to marry, as did the daughters themselves. Why, then, do we find working mothers making less of an investment in courtship activity?

We suggest that what we have found is a different view of social placement. That is, for working mothers work displaces, at least in part, the importance of marriage. It is not that working mothers do not want their daughters to marry (nearly all of them want this); but perhaps they want them to marry for somewhat different reasons, so their behavior varies accordingly. Our data provide one or two opportunities to make a test of such possibility.

We begin by assuming that mothers who think it is likely that their daughters will work, in addition to marrying and having a family, have a view of their daughters' futures that differs from that of mothers who do not think it likely that their daughters will be employed outside of the home after marriage.

Table 2

Maternal Encouraging Behavior, by the Likelihood that Their Daughters Will Work

	N	Mean Encouraging Score	t	P
Mothers who think their daughters likely to work	144	25.062	1.911 (210 df)	< .05
Mothers who think their daughters not likely to work	68	26.956		

While the majority of the daughters did plan to work in addition to marrying and having a family, Table 2 shows that the encouraging behavior of mothers who think it is likely that their own daughters will not work is found to be greater than that of mothers who think that their daughters probably will be employed outside the home. The t-ratio nearly attains the .025 level of significance (t=1.960).

Such a finding, of course, supports our hypothesis, but it also does more than that. It supports the notion that mothers may be doing more to encourage courtship when their view of their daughters' futures is such that marriage and family seem to be the most viable single option for the daughter. A different view of social placement may be operating for mothers who think that work may offer a certain degree of such placement for their daughters, who presumably would be less dependent on their husbands and the domestic roles of wife and mother in order to attain adult status and participate in the reward structure of the society.

To pursue our investigation of the impact of maternal employment, therefore, we may control for the likelihood that the daughter will be employed, to see if maternal employment retains its force. If the likelihood of the daughter's employment is an intervening variable between the mother's employment and her encouraging behavior, we would expect the relationship we found between the latter two variables to be attenuated when controlling for this indicator of the mother's view of her daughter's future.

Table 3

Encouraging Behavior of Mothers Who Think that
Their Daughters are Likely to Work, by Maternal Employment Status

	N	Mean Encouraging Score	t	p
Mother Works	80	24.362		
Mother does not work	63	25.762	1.320 (141 df)	ns

Table 4

Encouraging Behavior of Mothers Who Think that
Their Daughters are Not Likely to Work,
by Maternal Employment Status

	N	Mean Encouraging Score	t	p
Mother works	30	26.167		
Mother does not work	38	27.579	.733 (66 df)	ns

Table 3 and 4 show that the difference between the encouraging behavior of working and non-working mothers no longer attains statistical significance when we control for the likelihood that the daughter will work or not. Furthermore, the difference between the means is reduced; non-significant findings are not simply due to fewer cases.

As a final test of this notion of differential views of social placement we may select the "pure types" of such mothers and compare them. That is, we

compare non-working mothers of daughters who are not likely to work (according to their mothers) and working mothers of daughters who are seen by their mothers as likely to work after marriage. Such a comparison offers us an opportunity to compare differences in maternal behavior when the life-circumstances of the mother and those projected for the daughter are congruent for mother-daughter pairs.

Table 5

Comparison of Non-Working Mothers of Daughters Who Are Not Likely to Work with Working Mothers of Daughters Who Are Likely to Work

	N	Mean Encouraging Score	t	p
Non-working mothers of daughters who are not likely to work	38	27.579	2.296 (116 df)	< .025
Working mothers of daughters who are likely to work	80	24.362		

Table 5 shows the comparison of the two types to have increased the significance of the difference between working and non-working mothers with respect to their encouragement of their daughters' courtship activity; the t-ratio is actually closer to the .01 level of significance (t = 2.358) than it is to the .025 level (t = 1.980).

Conclusions

We conclude that we have demonstrated support for the notion of a causal chain that links (a) maternal employment with (b) a different view of social placement with (c) differential maternal encouraging behavior or involvement in courtship. When we note the additional finding that working mothers are more likely to view employment as an option for their own daughters than are unemployed mothers,[1] we further conclude that the evidence is in favor of a change in maternal attitudes toward the social placement of daughters. It is suggested that this change is due to the mother's view of employment, and its consequence is a lessened degree of involvement in a daughter's courtship and mate choice, the latter being relatively less prominent in the mind of a working woman, at least in the traditional sense of marriage being her "career" and the guarantor of her status as an adult in the society. Resource-exchange theory has served quite respectably in this area of family and sex role behavior.

Furthermore, we suggest in this research that families are not found to be less important in our individualistic, work-oriented culture, but rather they maintain their prominence in a mode appropriate to the social milieu. As observers such as Vincent (1966) have pointed out, the family is performing its tasks and functions with an eye toward adaptation--that is, survival

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[1] The majority of both working and non-working mothers expect that their daughters will work in addition to being married and having a family, but that expectation is greater among mothers who work themselves (73% versus 62%); this difference, however, is not statistically significant by the X^2 test (X^2 with 1 df = 2.13).

and the maximizing of rewards in a rapidly changing environment.[2] Such is apparently the case with respect to the task of the social placement of daughters. Working mothers are responding to the growing importance of work in the lives of women, as reflected in their decreased involvement in the courtship of their daughters, especially when their daughters are likely to work themselves. When daughters are seen as unlikely to work or pursue a career, however, even working mothers "try harder" to achieve social placement for their daughters through marriage. The next research challenge, therefore, is the part played by mothers and other family members in the socialization of daughters for work and career.

For women the social environment is indeed changing. It is not perhaps changing so much as some might wish, and it may be that this change is presently restricted in large part to a minority of the highly educated, education being a valuable resource in the employment market. We may doubtless expect the trend to continue, however, and the findings reported here support such an assertion. Future research may profitably be directed to pursuing the consequences and sharpening the relationships between the family, sex roles, and the world of work that we have reported in this investigation.

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[2]Another consideration is the extent to which the family may be profitably viewed as an independent variable in its own right, promoting change in the wider social order. Limitations of space prevent the exposition of this theme at this time.

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